How to Enjoy RUNE II’s Demo Version

Interviewer: After you finished developing RUNE II, were you able to take time off?

Taniguchi: Yes, I had two whole weeks off.

Interviewer: Did you take a trip somewhere?

Taniguchi: No, even during my time off I came to work every day around noon... (bitter smile)

Zin: That’s just a given. (bitter smile)

Interviewer: A given?! My goodness! (laughs)

Zin: I don’t even get time off, you know?

Interviewer: Well, you are the president after all, so that probably can’t be helped. (laughs)

Taniguchi: But things were pretty laid-back for me during those two weeks. I normally have to be at work by 10 AM, so it was nice to be able to go in around lunchtime.

Interviewer: I guess you have to work until pretty late, right?

Taniguchi: Once the game development stage is in full swing, I hardly ever leave work before midnight, unless there is work I can do at home, in which case I can leave the company around 10 PM.

Interviewer: Even 10 PM is later than most company employees. Anyhow, back to the topic at hand, you’re releasing a so-called “demo version” of RUNE II. What are the factors that made you decide this?

Taniguchi: The Gamecube has had a lot of titles for children due to their graphics and gameplay, so I don’t think there are many games right now that are more realistic, or in other words, have a more mature vibe about them. So, this discussion of a demo version started, but Nintendo has never proactively developed demo versions, right?

Interviewer: Yes, there are practically no precedents of that. Even considering its history to date, Nintendo was primarily a company that made cartridge games, and Gamecube was the first to shift to discs.

Taniguchi: So we negotiated with Nintendo to see if there was something we could do, and because we have a strong reputation within Mario Club[1] and are confident in our capability to make games, we asked if we could do something that users are able to actually play, and that's how we ended up making this demo version.

Interviewer: Because of the fact that there are hardly any precedents, did the discussions sometimes not go smoothly?

Taniguchi: That's why I went to Kyoto quite a lot. I've been to Kyoto and back many times between the end of last year and now.

Interviewer: That's a lot of hard work. Thanks to your efforts we can now play the RUNE II demo version. How would you like to see users enjoy this game?

Taniguchi: For this demo version, we intentionally didn't put limitations on upgrades[2] in the shop. So I'd like it if users could come to realize as they play how they can make a deck that's just right for them. If they try hard, they should be able to collect around half of the cards.

Interviewer: What? Around 100 cards?!

Taniguchi: Yes, but that's if you play for several dozens of hours and leave the console turned on the whole time (laughs).

Interviewer: Yeah, because you can't save the game.

Taniguchi: It's hard work, but theoretically completely possible.

Interviewer: So, even though it's a demo version, users can see creatures that are fairly far ahead?

Taniguchi: Yes, they can.

Interviewer: That's very generous of you. (laughs)

Taniguchi: But still, it's only around half, and we made sure to hide the really good ones. (laughs)

1 Image caption: "Super Mario Club" is a part of Nintendo's internal development that playtests software to find bugs while also giving gameplay feedback.
2 class change in JPN

Interviewer: Anything else?

Taniguchi: I think that classic RPGs start off by having a battle with an enemy in an encounter, then choosing a command. With RUNE, the concept was that we wanted to make each battle more interesting, so we decided to express character's behavior with graphics by using cards. Of course, we still really value the action and RPG elements, but unfortunately there have been users who have seen this card aspect and gone "Um, actually card games aren't really my thing...", then decided not to play. But, if people actually give it a try, I think we will get a lot of positive feedback about how interesting the battles are.

Interviewer: How did RUNE rate with Mario Club?

Taniguchi: Just like with its predecessor, RUNE, RUNE II was regarded highly for the novelty of its system. For example, the protagonist doesn't fight by themselves, and has to use cards in order to fight. The card varieties[3] were also held in high regard because of the originality of how the card system is structured. Usually it's not often you have opportunities to use powerful magic or weapons from the early stages of a game, right? But with RUNE, even though it does entail risks, you can use such powerful items from the get-go, so it was highly regarded for the degree of freedom it offers users.

Interviewer: Because of the "novelty of the system" you mentioned, if someone tries the game out on a demo machine in a store for 15 minutes or so, they might not be able to sense the appeal of RUNE, right?

Taniguchi: But I think that's the case with RPGs in general. By obtaining items and leveling up bit by bit, you get the hang of it, learn what you have to do next, and through that, come to recognize what makes the game fun. For RUNE II, users can select 30 cards themselves, and I think this game's strength is that each user can play in their own unique way to accomplish their goals.

Interviewer: We had readers play the demo version, and many of them said that the more they played the game, the more interesting it became. I think a major point here is that they were able to play the "demo version," not just have a really short demo-play in a store.

Taniguchi: That's true. If you only play for a short time, you definitely couldn't remember all the card types. Also, there are more effects and a greater number of cards than before, so I think most users might not be able to grasp them all at first. We had a feeling this is a game

3 ED note: Still unsure about this sentence. "□□□

that you have to play for a while to understand the gameplay, so that’s partly why we asked to have this “demo version” included as a magazine bonus.

Interviewer: But even though it’s a demo version, you definitely get a different impression of it because you can really get engrossed into it from the comfort of your home.

Taniguchi: Yes. Then you get familiar with the game and are able to smoothly do the things you want, which is a good feeling.

Interviewer: That’s why users should play this demo version all the way to the end, without giving up. Their impression of RUNE II will change.

Taniguchi: This time, with Nintendo Dream’s cooperation, we were able to drop the magazine price down even further, feature a brand-new design for the protagonist, and add a bunch of other pleasing elements to make the demo version attractive. That’s why I hope a lot of people will give it a try.

Interviewer: Wasn’t it pretty tough to make a new design for this demo version?

Taniguchi: Our graphic designers are actually pretty speedy at what they do. Even so, because I asked them to do this out of the blue, they were like “What?!” (laughs). But when I told them how important it was, they got it done in around 3 or 4 days.

Interviewer: I guess as the producer of RUNE II, you have to say things that the team members don’t necessarily like to hear. (laughs)

Taniguchi: Yes, well, this is the third game I’ve made together with the core team members. So I think they have just given in to the way I am. They’re like “Oh boy, here he goes again,” kinda thing. (laughs)

Interviewer: Do you also do director-type work?

Taniguchi: Yes, I originally started out as a 3D modeller, so I really nitpick when I check animation or modelling. That said, I can lend a hand if we are behind schedule with the graphics in the later stages of development. (laughs)

You had a meeting for several dozens of hours to finalize the title?!

Interviewer: By the way, why did you call this game “RUNE”?

Taniguchi: Hahaha (laughs).

Interviewer: Why are you laughing? (laughs)

Taniguchi: Actually, I have no talent for naming whatsoever, so we put together a team in our company purely to come up with a title, and they made the decision. And even though this was decided at a much later stage, the origin of the name is the Runic alphabet[4]. We want to emphasize the mystique that only users who possess the “mystery stone” can use cards, so that’s how we came up with the word “Rune.” Also, I don’t know if this is true or not, but apparently games with the letter “n” in their titles sell better. (laughs)

Interviewer: I do hear that a lot. (laughs).

Taniguchi: I personally like the way the word “RUNE” rolls off the tongue and just sounds so good to the ears. The downside is that we have heard from some people that the title doesn’t indicate what kind of game it is...

Interviewer: When I first saw the title “RUNE” I wasn’t sure how to pronounce it. I was like “That new game Fromsoftware is releasing...is it pronounced “Ru-neh”? (laughs).

Taniguchi: I hear that a lot. Also, the manuscripts sent to us to check from publishing companies often write it “LUNE” with an “L.”

Interviewer: I can understand how they’d make such a mistake. (laughs) Did Nintendo have any opinions about going with a title in katakana?

Taniguchi: Before that, they were questioning whether or not we should really go with the title “RUNE.” (laughs)

Interviewer: Ah, so they also thought it wasn’t easy to understand?

Taniguchi: Exactly. But we are pretty meticulous about giving a game a title that isn’t a direct description of the game itself but something that stimulates the users’ imagination and makes them wonder a bit about what the nature of the game is. I mean, we could have just called it “Big Adventure Using Cards,” but... (laughs)

4 Image caption: The Runic alphabet is native to the Germanic peoples, and was seen and used in carvings in the places they lived primarily around the 20th century.

Interviewer: Haha. That *would* be really simple to understand.

Taniguchi: If we called it that though, people would instantly know exactly what the game is about and there is a risk they might get turned off. On the other hand, if they see the title “RUNE” they might be like “RUNE? I wonder what that’s about?” and it may become a topic of conversation.

Interviewer: Mr. Zin, do you offer advice regarding titles?

Zin: Nobody ever brings me the final, polished proposal, only ever very “work-in-progress” ones. (laughs) Also, when deciding on a title, a lot of the time it isn’t just the development stream that does it, but rather everyone gets together and shares their views.

Taniguchi: Sometimes we can have a single meeting to decide on a title that lasts for more than 24 hours. For example, starting from Friday night then just going on and on into Sunday morning, and by that stage we are all just a mess. (laughs) Of course we have some breaks in between.

Zin: Yeah, but in the end it’s just no good, right? Everything just gets scrapped or something. (laughs)

Interviewer: Wow, that’s really gruelling (laughs). Incidentally, just like with the first RUNE, is there a reason why you went with a female protagonist?

Taniguchi: In the previous title, when we came up with the concept that “the protagonist can’t attack,” for some reason we felt it was good to go with a sense of “powerlessness.” Physique-wise, women simply have less strength than men, so in order to convey the notion that “You can’t fight” we thought a female character was the right fit.

Interviewer: I see. Is there a real-life model you based the protagonist on?

Taniguchi: No, she is basically the manifestation of my personal preferences (laughs). The designers came up with various candidates, and made specific requests like “Come on, make her eyes more cat-like” etc., but in the end it reflected all my preferences.

Interviewer: You weren’t inspired by a celebrity or someone?

Taniguchi: I guess I was sort of influenced by my preferences in women... (laughs) But no, it isn’t the case that there was a real-life woman we based the protagonist’s appearance on.

Interviewer: By the way, which female celebrity do you like?

Taniguchi: (In a slightly embarrassed tone) Ko Shibasaki.[5] (laughs)

Interviewer: Oh, I sort of get that. (laughs) Do you use the same underlying image for both "Katia," the protagonist from the previous title, and "Liz," the protagonist of RUNE II?

Taniguchi: No, for the first RUNE, we chose a princess as the protagonist because we really wanted to emphasize the "powerlessness" part, so a princess who normally doesn't ever pick up anything heavy was the perfect fit. For Liz, however, we wanted to strengthen the RPG portion, that's why we've emphasized the growth elements and action elements. That's why we've changed her design to give her this touch of wildness, or like, she's a girl that can get things done, kind of feel. So the personalities of the protagonists for RUNE and RUNE II are in fact polar opposites; Katia is reserved and Liz is active.

Interviewer: I see.

Taniguchi: I personally don't like making the protagonist speak. After all, it's better to leave room for the player to intervene, right? That's why neither protagonist speaks.

Interviewer: Why did you name the protagonist of RUNE II "Liz"?

Taniguchi: I just liked the way it sounded, that's it. I had the team think up several female names then read them out loud to me. After listening to them all, the one that left the strongest impression on me was "Liz," so I went with that.

Interviewer: Wow. That's an interesting way to decide.

Taniguchi: Well, it's probably only me who does it that way. (laughs)

A Producer Who Makes Creatures Himself

Interviewer: Is there some kind of inspiration behind the worldview of RUNE?

Taniguchi: Not specifically, no. Here at Fromsoftware, we have gotten used to making fantasy-genre games and all of the staff share a unified worldview. When we have meetings, all one of us needs to say is "You know, like this," and the rest of us can instantly visualize what they

5 Ko Shibasaki is a celebrity who works in music and dramas. Well, who can say if she resembles Katia or Liz…http://www.stardust.co.jp/roo-ms/kou/
ED note: the link no longer works.

mean. From that point, we form the design, the models, and the programming – that's the process. We all do our best to watch movies or read books of the fantasy genre as much as possible.

Interviewer: There are lots of different varieties of creatures in this series, but yet they all seem to go well together.

Taniguchi: Yes, that's true. It's because the fantasy world that Fromsoftware is trying to depict is something standardized in the minds of all the employees here, so as a result, we always end up creating well-balanced content (laughs).

Interviewer: How did you conceive and decide upon the creatures?

Taniguchi: Planning is included in the development stream, and the person in charge of planning has to think of hundreds of things. For example, the features and attack methods of each creature. Things like graphics and names come at a much later stage. We then have a meeting to filter through the pile of potentials and cut it down to around 30%. We repeated this process several times to ultimately get it the way you see it now.

Interviewer: Do you have selection criteria?

Taniguchi: When deciding on key matters, I sometimes make an executive decision, but essentially we often decide through voting.

Interviewer: By the way, the fairies Rimu and Rii are very different from other creatures, aren't they?

PR person: Rimu and Rii were added to the game at the specific request of the advertising and sales departments. They wanted to have cute characters in there.

Interviewer: As the producer, Mr. Taniguchi, are you happy to accommodate requests from the advertising department?

Taniguchi: My policy when working is, no matter which department the suggestion comes from, if it interests me I will discuss it further with them and give it proper consideration.

Interviewer: There are a lot of unusual card illustrations.

Taniguchi: Because we have over 200 types of cards this time, we had room to include some jokester type characters, so there's this playful aspect to it like "You couldn't actually use this character in a battle, right?!" Also, from the perspective of valuing our users from the previous title, we incorporated mechanisms whereby the user benefits if they have saved data from the first RUNE.

Interviewer: This time the card collection elements are broader, aren't they?

Taniguchi: Actually, I wanted to get rid of the really detailed way of collecting cards in the first installment of the series but I heard feedback from users that "If we are going to collect cards, then we want to collect them all," so I was conflicted. There are more cards this time, so I decided on the direction from quite a defiant stance of "Surely you can be happy even if you don't collect a few cards!" It would be quite difficult to get the full collection unless you travelled around the entire town and map. Of course we've prepared elements that serve as hints and there are blatantly suspicious areas too.

Interviewer: In addition to the cards, there are new combos, aren't they?

Taniguchi: I felt with RUNE that the combo impact was too weak, so that's why we added more, but in fact, making these combos involves a lot of work, so the graphic designers weren't really happy when I asked them to do it (bitter smile). I asked them to add special effects to each combo.

Interviewer: You can really get a sense of the developers' playfulness from the combos.

Taniguchi: Actually, I did about half of the animations and camera work for them.

Interviewer: But you're the producer! (laughs)

Taniguchi: Because my origin is 3D work, it was actually so much fun to do.

Interviewer: Mr. Zin, did you have any requests regarding the content of RUNE II?

Zin: I had some criticism, more like it. (laughs)

Taniguchi: Our president here has the longest play time after the development team.

Zin: So, after playing for a while, I'd let the team know the parts I couldn't accept. (laughs)

Interviewer: You were complaining? (laughs)

Zin: Of course I also offered suggestions, not just complaints. (laughs)

Taniguchi: He's eliminated a lot of data, but the longest playtime was over 60 hours!

Zin: And yet I still wasn't able to collect all the cards. (laughs) I still have a few to go.

Trigger behind the creation of RUNE and its reception overseas

Interviewer: What was the trigger to creating RUNE in the first place?

Taniguchi: Initially after establishing the development stream, we had to think of a game to develop but we just couldn't seem to come up with anything good. So I had a long meeting with the president and we ended up thinking "Maybe we could do something using cards?" We thought perhaps we could make it a game where users manipulate monsters in a fantasy world. Those little ideas converged and became the angle we wanted to work with.

Interviewer: So the card concept was there from the start?

Taniguchi: It was more like we asked ourselves "What would a good medium be to trap monsters?" and then came to the conclusion of cards. Of course there were other candidates such as crystals or magic rocks but when we pictured the player in the real world, it is hard to imagine they'd walk around with a bunch of crystals, right? (laughs) That's why we went with cards, because they are more common in everyday life.

Interviewer: Players would have a lot, too. (laughs) By the way, RUNE is the first game made for the Gamecube, but was it decided from the beginning that RUNE would be made for the Gamecube?

Taniguchi: Yes, it was.

Interviewer: That was from around the time Gamecube was announced in the press conference? (2000)

Taniguchi: I think we, Fromsoftware, were a bit of a slow-starter. We had no relationship with Nintendo up until that point, so we just listened to the press conference as creators.

Zin: At first there was discussion about making RUNE for Xbox but when we switched to a multiplatform approach, we decided to go for Gamecube.

Interviewer: In most cases, multiplatform means using the same software for different hardware.[6]

Zin: We are clumsy, probably (laughs) Also, many of our users have multiple hardware devices and it is difficult to draw upon the unique features on each individual hardware.

Interviewer: Nintendo's hardware products are generally popular with families so did you consider making a game that young kids would like?

Zin: We did mull that over quite a bit. But we simply thought it would be fine to make a title aiming at the age group of our other titles to date, and it wouldn't be so easy for us to just whip up a title for younger children. Plus, making games for the Cube (Gamecube) is a process of trial-and-error for us.

Interviewer: What's the average age of RUNE users?

Taniguchi: I think the majority of our users are junior high school kids. I guess they are a little younger than users of our titles to date. I think that is affected by the average age group of Gamecube users.

Zin: I think it's the perfect age group for this game.

Taniguchi: To date, senior high school kids have come to know about us through games like Armored Core[7], so RUNE has provided us a great opportunity to become known among junior high school kids too.

Interviewer: How did users respond when you released the first RUNE?

Taniguchi: Some users already knew about Fromsoftware, so we did get a lot of feedback that RUNE really suited our particular style of game. RUNE was also favorably reviewed because, like we mentioned earlier, it is a multiplatform game but it isn't as though we took an existing game and just added a few new elements to it. Even still, we were able to fully utilize the features of each hardware platform. That's a bit of a tech-nerd answer though. (laughs)

6

7 Armored Core is a hugely popular Playstation action series that's now onto its third instalment. It's undoubtedly the first thing you think of when you think of Fromsoftware.

Interviewer: RUNE is a software that players are satisfied with however, unfortunately, it isn’t as though it is a huge hit. With that in mind, why did you decide to make a sequel?

Taniguchi: After we completed the development of RUNE, I suddenly got the feeling that maybe we could make something more interesting using this system. Also, RUNE is extremely popular overseas and fans really wanted a sequel. That’s why we decided to make II.

Pg 4

Interviewer: The U.S. magazine, NINTENDO POWER[8], did a big article on RUNE, didn't it?

Taniguchi: Yeah, and it's pretty cool that in game stores over there, RUNE II pop-up advertising boards are lined up right next to Zelda ones! (laughs)

Interviewer: Why do you think RUNE is so popular overseas?

Taniguchi: Honestly, it was the same for the first PS2 title that I produced[9], so maybe I have a knack for making games that become a hit overseas (laughs). Well, in my case, more than the graphics and story, what I pay close attention to when making a game is the sensation one gets from playing. I really wanted to make a game that was intuitive and fun. It doesn't matter if the character isn't well-known overseas, the idea is that everyone joins in and has fun, so even debut games get fair consideration from users. From my own analysis, I think the gameplay is what makes RUNE popular overseas.

Interviewer: What is the shipment ratio for overseas versus Japan?

Taniguchi: It's around 1-2.5-1. That's the ratio for Japan, U.S., then Europe

Interviewer: So you sell double the amount in the U.S. than Japan. II was also released in the U.S. before Japan, wasn't it?

Taniguchi: That's right, about a week earlier.

Interviewer: Is there anything different to the version released in Japan?

Taniguchi: Actually, yes. You see, the female image users want to see in games differs depending on the country. So to put it bluntly, Liz's body shape.

Interviewer: You mean the preferred proportions differ between countries?

Taniguchi: The Japanese version of Liz is slender and delicate… Well, again that's my personal preference. (laughs) But the Liz for the overseas version has quite a solid build. I said to the person in charge "Isn't this a bit much?" but they answered "No, this version is better (for overseas consumers).

8 Image caption: Back then, Nintendo Power also put RUNE (known as Lost Kingdoms in the West) right on the front cover! A desire for more and well-received gameplay is what led to a second game.
9 ED note: That would be The Adventures of Cookie & Cream.

Interviewer: So the Liz in the Japanese version is different to the one in the U.S. version?

Taniguchi: Actually, it’s a really subtle difference. Some of the changes are the preferences of the main graphic designer and aren’t distinguishable by looking at the character normally. You have to see the actual coordinate axis to tell.

Secret Story of RUNE II Development with Prolonged Sleep Deprivation

Interviewer: How many people were involved in the making of RUNE II?

Taniguchi: I think this goes for all game developers, but the number of people involved at the busiest stages differ to other stages. For example, we started out with around 10 people but ultimately this number grew to around 30 or 40. For RUNE II, there is a higher quantity of cards, so we needed more graphic designers, too.

Interviewer: You were able to develop it in less than a year?

Taniguchi: Yes, that’s right. Two key factors to making a game are whether or not the team members all have a common understanding and groundwork. With a sequel, those aspects are significantly simplified. Even if I explain to a producer of another stream, all I need to say is “In the previous game we did it like this...” and they would immediately grasp my point. So in other words we were able to jump right in feet first this time, and that ultimately enabled us to shorten the development time.

Interviewer: The foundation for RUNE and RUNE II might be the same but the sequel is far more advanced as a game, right?

Taniguchi: Well, yes. For example if you talk to a producer about the system, ultimately it’s only a verbal explanation and there is no way of knowing what will happen when the idea you’ve discussed is reflected in the game. But because we have the first RUNE as the foundation, it is easy to get a concrete image of what we are discussing, so things get taken care of smoothly and take form essentially the way we visualized them and I think these are the reasons we were able to complete the development in a shorter period of time.

Interviewer: What kind of thing did you struggle with during development?

Taniguchi: For this project, we entered the “game-making” stage immediately, so it took its toll on us in terms of physical endurance. (laughs)

Interviewer: Oh, I see. In other words rather than the project gradually ramping up and picking up pace, it was all-systems-go from the outset, right?

Taniguchi: Precisely. So basically I was tired throughout the whole development period (laughs).

Interviewer: Ah, so you were sleep-deprived then.

Taniguchi: By day I would prepare production-related documents and by night I'd make combos – that was my routine.

Interviewer: You served multiple roles then?

Taniguchi: Yes. After everyone went home, I'd stay behind and make combos, bit by bit.

Interviewer: That would take its toll on you physically but it was still fun, right?

Taniguchi: Oh, definitely (laughs). I always have fun when I'm playing around with graphic creation tools. But once you become a producer, the nature of your work is very different to the actual hands-on stuff. Document preparation is the main focus. In my case, though, I entered this industry because I liked computer graphics. That's why fiddling around with polycons and textures is very relaxing for me.

Interviewer: So staying behind after everyone goes home and making combos is more for your hobby than work? (laughs)

Taniguchi: You got me! (laughs) Well, I guess it's a case of my hobby and work overlapping.

Interviewer: Okay so, after less than one month after the release of this demo version, the official version will be released. What kind of people would you like to see play it?

Taniguchi: Honestly, even I get a bit turned off when I hear "card game." But if a user gives it a go and learns the rules, I think they will see just how intricate this game is.

Interviewer: People don't get tired of card games that easily either, do they?

Taniguchi: That is why I'm hoping this game will be an opportunity for users who otherwise wouldn't play card games to become familiar with them. Also, for those users who feel like the RPG they are playing gets boring once they gain experience and level-up, I recommend RUNE II because you can savour a different kind of battle each time. Also, of course, the official

version contains a lot of elements that aren’t in the demo version, so I really hope users give it a try.

Interviewer: Recent games have very user-friendly aspects about them, you know? For example the focus is all on points that appeal to users. I feel like RUNE is actually purposefully doing the opposite.

Taniguchi: Maybe it’s just me, but I’d like our users to be so into RUNE that when they go to school they are thinking “When I get home, I want to play RUNE.” I want them to always have it on their minds. That’s the kind of game I aim to create. From that perspective, it’s probably not very “gentle.”

Zin: I guess one analogy might be that, if you want to go to the bathroom but instead you hold it for a long time, when you DO eventually go, it’s a greater feeling of accomplishment, right? On the other hand, if you wet your pants then that’s totally not cool (laughs). I guess that’s the borderline kind of scenario we are aiming for. You need to have a certain amount of shock before you can gain a sense of accomplishment. But if the shock is too much...see, it’s a matter of balance. That’s how I want our company’s games to be overall.

Interviewer: There are probably going to be some users who play RUNE II, then want to try out the first RUNE.

Taniguchi: The battle system of these two games is actually different so users might sense that to a small degree when they play. Although RUNE II is a sequel and it inherits the game system to some extent, I think users would get more enjoyment if they saw RUNE and RUNE II as two separate games.

Interviewer: Meanwhile, President Zin! Are there any more games in the work for the Gamecube software after RUNE II?

Zin: Oh, Cube? (he says, then starts cooking the meat). Um...well yes, as a matter of fact.

Interviewer: So... honestly, how many streams are there developing games for Cube?

Zin: Honestly? (laughs) Well, you know, a bit of this and that. We are heading in that direction in various ways.

Interviewer: Will you be announcing this at E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo)?

Zin: No, not at E3.

Interviewer: Well, then perhaps around the time of the Tokyo Game Show in Autumn?

Zin: Yes, I think we can announce something by then. There’s a lot of hurdles, you know. Hey, eat your meat, it’ll burn! (laughs)

Speed round with Mr. Zin and Mr. Taniguchi

What kind of company is Fromsoftware?

Zin: Well...(thinks deeply) it’s just your average, normal company, really (laughs) I mean, I am strict about various things, but I never really liked the title “creator,” you see.

Interviewer: You do prefer the word “craftsman” over “creator,” I know.

Zin: Exactly. A lot of people go around calling themselves “creators,” but I think whether or not you truly are a creator isn’t up to you, but those around you. I think it’s embarrassing to boast that you are “creative.” Also, I often say I don’t like people who use the word “definitely.” For example “It’s definitely got to be this, or that.” The reason for this is because, when you say that, you automatically stomp on other peoples’ alternative ideas and rule them out as invalid. Instead we should be like “Well, this is my idea...what do you think?”

Taniguchi: I think Fromsoftware really gives everything it's got. The founding team members worked so hard, and that motivated me to work hard as well. Then, the junior employees see me giving it my best shot, and they follow suit.

Zin: Our company is quite different to most companies these days because we are hoping to keep our employees for life.

Why did you join Fromsoftware?

Taniguchi: I joined Fromsoftware in 1995 around the time King’s Field III was released. I’d originally been doing work involving preparing architectural drawings using CAD. Those 2D drawings gradually shifted to 3D. Back then, the graphics used in the arcade game “Virtua Fighter'' were the absolute most advanced 3D graphics out there, and when I became involved in 3D, I started to get the sense it was quite relevant to me. I had been into games to begin with, so I thought to myself that maybe I could do it if I tried really hard. When I had my job interview with Fromsoftware, I took in drawings of houses and things (laughs). President Zin said to me “Maybe you can draw maps too!” then hired me. I guess that is why I’m so finicky about the position of doorknobs and pillars in RUNE because I just can’t accept it if they are positioned all wrong from an architectural point of view!

Interviewer: President Zin, do you remember interviewing Mr. Taniguchi?

Zin: Mmmm… (he has his mouth full of meat, so can’t speak)

Taniguchi: I'm sure he doesn't remember. Our president is always just like this (laughs). My job interview was in the president's office, but afterwards, once I began working for Fromsoftware, I actually asked my senior "so who's our president?" (laughs) It's because Mr. Zin here is very down-to-earth so he doesn't give off that typical CEO vibe.

PR person: I was also interviewed by President Zin, but I didn't think he was the president! (laughs) At the start, I was assigned to a department in a different location, so I didn't normally get the opportunity to meet the president. It wasn't until I saw his picture in a magazine article that I realized the person who I'd had my job interview with was the president of our company (laughs).

What do you love the most about making games?

Zin: I guess I love the fact that the very first game we ever developed, King's Field for the Playstation, sold more than we had expected. Thanks to its success, I gained the confidence to attempt developing our next game.

Taniguchi: For me, I think the thing I loved the most at first was seeing my name in the credits at the end of the game. I felt happy that maybe, even if I died, my name would still be out there, being seen by somebody. The thing I've loved the most recently is meeting Mr. Miyamoto from Nintendo. He's a much more softly-spoken person than they make him out to be in the media. According to hearsay, once when he was asked "What do you think about this game?" he responded "Are you talking about the gameplay or the marketability? I could talk about each of those topics for 3 hours." Apparently the interviewer listened quietly to him talk that entire time though (laughs). That's why I had the impression of him as a really serious thinker.But, when I actually met him, he seemed much more laidback and easy to talk to. If the discussion is about the real essence of a game, then Mr. Miyamoto will straight out ask a person (including me when I gave a presentation to him), "What exactly are you trying to say?" He is the kind of person who thinks carefully before he speaks when it comes to game content. After all, he made Mario Bros, so even though I was really nervous to finally come face-to-face with this legend of the gaming industry, I was also incredibly happy in that moment that I'd chosen this as my career. I mean, for most people, Mr. Miyamoto is someone you can only watch from afar and never actually speak to.

What is the toughest thing about your job?

Taniguchi: Basically, everything is tough (laughs). I believe everything I think about during the day is reflected in the games I produce. So whether I'm in the bath, or even when I'm sleeping, I've always got games on my mind. Like what I said before about the sense of

accomplishment being stronger if you've endured for a while beforehand, well, that is pretty much how we are all the time, so we need to overcome all of these challenges.

Mr. Taniguchi, which game do you have the most memories associated with?

Taniguchi: That would have to be Mario Bros, because it's the first game I ever played. I was just so intrigued to see the characters in this game moving on the TV screen just the way I told them to. Games have advanced a lot since those days but it still had the greatest impact on me.

Where do you go to get inspiration for games?

Taniguchi: In my case, I usually talk with others to get inspired. But I ultimately make decisions either in the bath or on the toilet (laughs). I also think of some real crazy stuff right before bed, so I make sure to keep a notepad right by my pillow.

Interviewer: If you think of something right before you're about to fall asleep, do you jump right up out of bed?

Taniguchi: Oh, no. I'd probably just go straight to sleep so there's not much chance of me finding inspiration at that point. I'm always sleep-deprived so I can sleep anytime, anywhere.

What's the most important thing when making games?

Zin: That each individual player can have a gameplay style completely unique to themself.

Taniguchi: Back when I did graphics, I did my best to make models that exuded a distinct personality so users could tell in one glance what kind of character it was. But since becoming a producer, I've been strongly driven to have the games we develop rank in among those games that people find most memorable. That's why I am simply so happy to get feedback from our users. It doesn't matter if it's negative feedback, I'm still happy. When someone can feel something from a game I was a part of making, even if it isn't in a good way, like "that game was so boring," the point is that they've remembered that a game called "RUNE" exists. That makes me happy.

Fromsoftware's main series

Interview Postscript

Exclusive only to the demo version of RUNE II, our main character, “Angel Liz.” Her hairstyle and clothes will be quite different from her appearance in the full version of the game.

Here’s what she looks like in-game. Can you believe this only took them 3-4 days to make a design of this caliber?

The woman in the middle of the photo is Kurusu-san from the publicity department. We at Nintendo Dream hear she’s really giving it her all to spread the news like wildfire!* uncertain

Here’s one example of the new summoning combos. The visual impact in-game has gone up a few levels!

There’ll be more than 200 creatures appearing in this game. I wonder which creatures will be the silly ones?

They let us see some of the development material during the interview. The woman seen here is actually some of the first development sketches for Liz!

What will Fromsoftware bring out at Autumn’s Tokyo Game Show? It’s a long way off, but we’re all free to dream as much as we want, right? Maybe a whole new game!? Or maybe a sequel to RUNE!? Wait, well, maybe we should wait until RUNE II comes out before we start jumping to conclusions…

Grilling in progress.

Fromsoftware’s logo. When we asked President Zin about it, he said the name wasn’t really inspired by anything… But perhaps there was a team who dedicated dozens of hours to creating the name!? Nah, probably not.